

FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 148
CHARLES MEDD

JULY 6, 1976

"THE KILLER ANGELS" BY MICHAEL SHAARA

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA NOW BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES FROM THE BOOKSHELF -- A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, CHARLES MEDD'S REVIEW OF "KILLER ANGELS", A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL ABOUT THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG, PUBLISHED IN 1975 BY THE DAVID MCKAY COMPANY. HERE IS YOUR BOOK EDITOR_____.

EDITOR: IT WAS AT CEREMONIES DEDICATING A NATIONAL CEMETARY AT GETTYSBURG THAT ABRAHAM LINCOLN GAVE ONE OF THE MOST INSPIRED STATEMENTS EVER DELIVERED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. IN HIS TWO-MINUTE SPEECH, LINCOLN PREDICTED THAT "THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER" WHAT HE WAS SAYING, BUT RATHER WHAT THE MEN WHO DIED THERE HAD DONE TO PRESERVE "GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE (AND) FOR THE PEOPLE." THE FACT IS, HOWEVER, THAT THE WORDS OF LINCOLN ARE PERHAPS BETTER REMEMBERED THAN WHAT HAPPENED AT GETTYSBURG THOSE FIRST THREE DAYS OF JULY, 1863.

IT WAS DURING THAT BRIEF PERIOD THAT TWO ARMIES MET, MORE OR LESS BY CHANCE, AND FOUGHT THE BLOODIEST AND WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT BATTLE EVER WAGED ON AMERICAN SOIL. IT WAS THERE THAT SOUTHERN TROOPS, COMMANDED BY GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE, WERE STOPPED IN THEIR DEEPEST PENETRATION OF THE NORTH IN WHAT BECAME A VITAL TURNING POINT IN THE CIVIL WAR. THE CONFLICT, MARKED BY HEROISM AND TACTICAL ERRORS ON BOTH SIDES, HAS LONG FASCINATED MILITARY HISTORIANS. BUT IT WAS FOR THE AVERAGE READER

EDITOR: THAT NOVELIST MICHAEL SHAARA WROTE A FICTIONAL VERSION,
(CONT'D) BASED ON OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF THE BATTLE,
TO TELL IN HIS WORDS "WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE THERE."
HIS CHARACTERS ARE BASED ON REAL HISTORICAL PERSONS.
AS WITH ALL GREAT STRUGGLES, GETTYSBURG HAD ITS SHARE OF
HEROES AND FOOLS, AND THEY WERE FOUND IN BOTH CAMPS. IN
AUTHOR SHAARA'S BOOK, "THE KILLER ANGELS", TWO HEROES
STAND OUT: LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES LONGSTREET, IN REAL
LIFE AS WELL AS IN THIS NOVEL, A FULL-BEARDED, SLOW-TALKING
PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER WAS ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE. HE CORRECTLY
BELIEVED THAT GETTYSBURG WAS THE WRONG PLACE AND THE WRONG
TIME FOR THE REBEL ARMY TO DO BATTLE. THE OTHER ANGEL IS
COLONEL LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN, A PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AT
BOWDOIN COLLEGE IN HIS NATIVE STATE OF MAINE, A VOLUNTEER
SOLDIER WHO EARNED INSTANT FAIRIE FOR HIS DEFENSE OF BIG
ROUND TOP HILL. HE GIVES THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNION
NORTH.

IT WAS CHAMBERLAIN WHO LED HIS BATTERED INFANTRY REGIMENT
DOWN THE SLOPES OF BIG ROUND TOP IN ONE OF THE NORTH'S
FIRST SUCCESSFUL COUNTER-ATTACKS OF THE WAR. WITH THE
SOUTHERN LINES BREAKING IN FULL RETREAT, AUTHOR SHAARA
DESCRIBES THE MAN FROM MAINE:

VOICE: "HE MOVED FORWARD AND BEGAN TO CLIMB THE HILL IN THE
DARK. AS HE WALKED HE FORGOT HIS PAIN; HIS HEART
BEGAN TO BEAT QUICKLY, AND HE FELT AN INCREDIBLE JOY.
HE LOOKED AT HIMSELF, WONDERINGLY, AT THE BELOVED MEN
AROUND HIM, AND HE SAID TO HIMSELF: LAWRENCE, OLD SON,
TREASURE THIS MOMENT, BECAUSE YOU FEEL AS GOOD AS A MAN
CAN FEEL."

EDITOR: COLONEL CHAMBERLAIN WAS AN IDEALIST WHO SAW THE CIVIL WAR AS A MORAL CRUSADE AGAINST THE EVILS OF SLAVERY. MOST OF HIS SOUTHERN COUNTERPARTS, HOWEVER, SAW THE WAR IN DIFFERENT TERMS -- AS A STRUGGLE AGAINST WHAT THEY CALLED NORTHERN TYRANNY. UNTIL GETTYSBURG, MOST OF THE MAJOR BATTLES HAD BEEN WON BY THE REBELS, ALL OF THEM WITHIN SOUTHERN BOUNDARIES. GETTYSBURG, A SMALL PENNSYLVANIA FARM VILLAGE SOME EIGHTY KILOMETERS NORTH OF WASHINGTON, WAS THE SOUTH'S FIRST AND ONLY MAJOR OFFENSIVE INTO ENEMY TERRITORY.

THE SOUTHERN FORCES A CONFIDENT ARMY OF SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND MEN--WERE LED BY THE GIFTED AND MUCH-RESPECTED GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE. THREE DAYS OF FIGHTING WOULD COST THE SOUTH ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF ITS INVADING TROOPS.

DURING THE FIRST CRITICAL DAY AT GETTYSBURG, AS THE REBEL ATTACK ON BIG ROUND TOP WAS BEING REPULSED, GENERAL LEE WAITED IN A GROVE, "LISTENING TO THE ENORMOUS SOUND OF WAR:". MICHAEL SHAARA SETS THE SCENE:

VOICE: "HE TOOK OFF HIS HAT, RAN HIS FINGERS THROUGH HIS HAIR, FELT HIS LIFE BEATING IN HIS CHEST. THE FIGHT WENT ON. LEE THOUGHT FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT DAY OF HIS SON, ROONEY, WOUNDED, LYING NOT FAR FROM HERE. HE CLOSED HIS EYES, PRAYED FOR HIS BOY, FOR ALL OF THEM. HE PUT HIS HAND DOWN ON BLACK DIRT, WAS REMINDED: PENNSYLVANIA. I AM THE INVADER."

EDITOR: THE ONE MAN WHO HAD SPOKEN OUT AGAINST THE ENCOUNTER AT GETTYSBURG WAS LEE'S CLOSEST AIDE, JAMES LONGSTREET.

EDITOR: THIS BIG, BROODING PROFESSIONAL HAD MADE HIS REPUTATION
(CONT'D) AS A DEFENSIVE SPECIALIST, AND HE URGED HIS COMMANDING
OFFICER TIME AND AGAIN TO DIRECT HIS FORCES TO THE
SOUTH, TOWARD WASHINGTON. ON THE THIRD DAY, LEE WAS
DETERMINED TO CRACK THE NORTHERN LINES AT THEIR CENTER,
AND LONGSTREET TRIED UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT TO DISSUADE
HIM, EVEN TO THE POINT OF PROVOKING LEE'S ANGER.

VOICE: "LEE TURNED AND LOOKED AT HIM, BUT THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE
IN THE FACE NOW; THE WEARINESS WAS SUDDENLY APPARENT.
THE OLD MAN HAD LOST CONTROL FOR A MOMENT AND THE PAIN
WAS THERE; THE EXHAUSTION DULLED THE EYES. LONGSTREET
FELT A SURGE OF EMOTION, HE WANTED TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH
THE OLD MAN, BUT THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. YOU COULD NOT SHOW
AFFECTION HERE, NO PLACE FOR IT HERE, TOO MANY MEN WILL
DIE."

SUMMING UP THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG, WINSTON CHURCHILL
WROTE: "THUS ENDED THE GREAT AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, WHICH
MUST UPON THE WHOLE BE CONSIDERED THE NOBLEST AND LEAST
AVOIDABLE CONFLICTS OF WHICH TILL THEN THERE WAS RECORD."

MOST HISTORIANS AGREE THAT THIS CRITICAL BATTLE WAS INDEED
UNAVOIDABLE, THAT HAD THESE TWO ARMIES NOT MET AT
GETTYSBURG A SIMILAR SETTING WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND. THAT
BOTH SIDES FOUGHT BRAVELY AND NOBLY WAS ALSO KNOWN TO THE
HISTORIANS, AND NOW -- WITH MICHAEL SHAARA'S SUPERBLY
CRAFTED NOVEL -- MUCH OF THE NOBILITY BECOMES CLEAR TO
THE REST OF US.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO A REPORT ON MICHAEL SHAARA'S NOVEL THE KILLER ANGELS. AND NOW AN INVITATION TO JOIN US NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER IN OUR SERIES OF REPORTS ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING ... FROM THE BOOKSHELF.

-0-

WJL/RTD